

U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Field Hearing

March 8, 2010

Good morning, Congresswoman McCollum. My name is Matt Kramer, and I am President of Teach For America, an AmeriCorps program. Teach For America is the national teacher corps of top recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools and become lifelong leaders in the effort to expand educational opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on how Teach For America is using federal funding and how it can best be utilized to address public needs. Teach For America receives federal funding from several sources. Teach For America

became an authorized program under the Higher Education Act in 2008.

This action allowed Congress to approve direct appropriations of funds to Teach For America through the U.S. Department of Education on an annual basis.

In FY2010, the federal government provided funding to Teach For America under this provision, plus additional funding through NASA specifically for training and supporting Math and Science teachers.

Additionally, as an AmeriCorps program, Teach For America receives funding through the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

Teach For America is a good investment and good steward of federal funding: every federal dollar invested in Teach For America leverages \$4 in private, state, or local funds. Teach For America demonstrates that federal resources can be an important lever to develop and promote programs that have a measurable impact on our nation's most pressing problems, particularly in education.

We are facing a critical problem in our nation's education system. By 4th grade, children growing up in low-income communities are on average 2 to 3 grade levels behind in math and reading than children in higher income neighborhoods (National Center of Education Statistics, NAEP, 2003). Only 50% will graduate high school by the time they turn 18, and will, on average, perform at the academic level of 8th graders in higher income communities. A child growing up in a low-income community is seven times less likely to graduate from college than a child from a wealthier area (Education Trust 2002). These disparities severely limit the life prospects of the 14 million children growing up in poverty today. Because African-American and Latino children are three times as likely to grow up in a low-income area, these disparities prevent many children of color from having equal opportunities in life.

Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality teaching is the single most important factor in student learning and that effective teachers have a significant impact on children's life prospects ("The Real Value of Value Added" Education Trust, 2004, citing multiple studies).

Despite this evidence, low-income students are less likely to get effective teachers in their classrooms than wealthier students ("The Real Value of Value Added," Education Trust, 2004). Low-income children are also far more likely to have teachers who scored poorly on college and licensure exams ("All Talk, No Action: Putting an End to Out-of-Field Teaching," Education Trust, 2002).

It is this issue – the achievement gap, and the corresponding need for highly effective teachers

to help address it – that is among the most pressing domestic national needs, and the type of issue that Congress and the Administration have charged agencies and programs with addressing.

Teach For America supports the Administration's focus on accountability and results-based funding for education, and hopes Congress can incorporate funding for Teach For America into this framework. Like Secretary Duncan, I believe that only programs with proven track records of effectiveness should receive federal funding. However, I also believe that excellent national programs, like Teach For America, with demonstrated results that are operating at scale need a reliable stream of annual funding, subject to continued demonstrations of their effectiveness.

Recent changes to CNCS regulations through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, coupled with the Administration's commitment to service as an important source of innovative solutions to society's most critical issues, will require CNCS to also allocate funding in a way that is more focused on programmatic impacts.

The Serve America Act divides AmeriCorps programs into five corps – Education Corps, Healthy Futures Corps, Energy Corps, Veterans Corps and Opportunity Corps – and requires that CNCS creates uniform performance measures to demonstrate the impact of programs serving within each corps. CNCS funding will be allocated to those programs that are able to demonstrate measurable results on indicators within their issue area.

Teach For America is a proven and effective program that will help the Education Corps expand and harness the power of service to achieve quantifiable results. During debate on the Edward

M. Kennedy Serve America Act, Members of Congress pointed to Teach For America as an example of a program with measurable results that they hoped to bring to scale with this legislation. (Congressional Record March 18, 2009)

Teach For America meets the need for highly effective teachers by recruiting our nation's most talented future leaders to commit two years to teaching in underserved communities. Since 1990, Teach For America has grown to include more than 24,000 corps members and alumni. We are now one of the nation's largest providers of teachers for low-income communities and at the same time we are building an ever-expanding force of alumni leaders who work from inside and outside of the education system to ensure that all of our nation's children have the opportunities they deserve.

Teach For America has a demonstrated record of success at improving educational and life prospects for students in low-income communities. Additionally, Teach For America corps members directly address many of the Education Corps indicators: they increase student engagement, make significant gains in student academic achievement and improve high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates.

To this end,

Teach For America has participated in a number of independent studies measuring the impact our corps members have on students and schools.

Research over time has conclusively shown that Teach For America corps members' impact on student achievement is at least as great as that of other new teachers.

Furthermore,

a growing body of research shows that in many cases, our corps members are more effective than other teachers, including certified and veteran teachers.

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. released an independent study in 2004 that compared the academic gains of students taught by TFA corps members with the gains of similar students

taught by other teachers in the same schools and grade. Using random assignment of students to teachers – research methodology widely regarded as the gold standard – this study found that students of TFA corps members made more progress in a year in both reading and math than would typically be expected, and attained significantly greater gains in math compared with students of other teachers, including veteran and certified teachers. The study also found that corps members were working in the highest-need classrooms in the country, where students begin the year on average at the 14th percentile against the national norm.

A 2008-2009 Urban Institute study found that TFA corps members were, on average, more effective than non-TFA teachers in all subject areas, especially in math and science, even when compared with experienced and traditionally certified teachers. Additionally, the study found the positive impact of having a TFA teacher was two or three times that of having a teacher with three or more years of experience.

Teach For America has proven to be a transformative experience for corps members. Our ever-expanding group of alumni – now nearly 20,000 strong – is acting as a powerful force for change by providing key leadership in education and non-profit organizations, and a critical workforce that builds ongoing capacity. Nearly two-thirds of TFA alumni remain in the field of education, and half of them are classroom teachers. More than 440 serve as school leaders, and alumni have founded and run more than 150 charter schools. Over 40 alumni hold leadership roles in district and charter systems across the country.

Teach For America has a once in a generation opportunity to grow and reach one million children in poverty each year. With a \$50 million appropriation of federal funding, Teach For America would be able to grow by 20 percent in FY11 and start on a trajectory to double in size over the next five years.

At this scale, Teach For America would truly become national in scope, providing nearly 17,000 teachers nationwide reaching over one million underserved students in nearly all 50 states by 2016.

This would represent 31 percent of all new hires, and 10 percent of the teacher workforce in the 60 highest need communities in the United States.

Doing so includes bringing more than 4,000 math and science teachers and approximately 1,000 early childhood educators into low-income communities.

Additionally, at this scale Teach For America's alumni base would expand to more than 52,000; producing approximately 1,650 school leaders and creating a powerful leadership force at the local level pushing for aggressive and bold education reform.

The **need** for Teach For America has never been greater. Beyond the moral and human implications of the achievement gap, the reality is that American students achieving at such low levels weakens our democracy and results in massive economic costs for our nation.

The achievement gap between students in low-income communities and those in wealthier communities ultimately causes a \$400 billion to \$670 billion loss to the national GDP each year, the equivalent of "a permanent recession" ("The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools," McKinsey & Company, Social Sector Office, 2009).

Amidst this need, the **demand** for Teach For America has never been higher. The organization received approximately 46,000 applications for the 2010 corps – a 30% increase over last year's record high.

Districts across the country are asking Teach For America to open new sites and c

urrent placement partners are requesting more teachers than we can provide.

The greatest tragedy is that, for the second year in a row, funding is the main factor limiting our ability to bring the best and the brightest into low-income classrooms.

Teach For America makes multi-year commitments to support corps members and alumni. Therefore, we require a reliable stream of federal funding to continue our growth and impact

Without any federal appropriation, Teach For America will be forced to shrink by 10 percent in FY11 and put future growth plans at risk. Meaning, we would be unable to place about 1,350 corps members, who would have reached more than 86,000 students in low-income communities.

Without a federal appropriation, tens of thousands of students in poverty will lose out on the opportunity to be taught by one of the future leaders who would otherwise become Teach For America corps members next year.

By directing \$50 million in federal funding toward an authorized program with a demonstrated track record of results, federal funding would make it possible for Teach For America to capitalize on the desire to address our nation's greatest injustice, and enable us to collectively move the needle in closing the achievement gap, changing the conversation about what is possible and how to achieve it, and rapidly move our nation toward the tipping point at which the movement to end educational inequity becomes unstoppable.